

THE
ORIGIN AND HISTORY
OF
ASTROLOGY

An Essay

BY
Dr. W. WYNN WESTCOTT.

1902

The History of Astrology,

BY

WM. WYNN WESTCOTT,

S.M. Soc. Ros. in Anglia, IX°.

THE nations of the ancient world were all more or less of opinion that the movements of the heavenly bodies, the occurrence of eclipses, and the appearance of comets exercised an influence over the fate of the human race, and the destinies of men. They feared the extraordinary manifestations of the sky, and saw portents destined for their instruction in the eclipses of the sun and moon, and in notable conjunctions of the planets. Eclipses of the sun especially, which caused a temporary darkness, seemed to them to be warnings of the anger of their gods, and signs of coming punishment.

The Greeks and the earlier Romans do not appear, so far as Greeks and Roman literature can show, to have practised, studied, or taught any original system, of which the astronomic observations were used for purposes of astrologic divination; this line of thought seems rather to have had its origin among the Chaldeans of Babylonia, from whom it came to the notice of the more Western nations after the travels and wars of Alexander the Great.

The Greek philosophers did not readily adopt astrologic ideals, but professors of the Chaldean magical art of Astrology spread among them, and we find astrological notions become notable in the later years of the Roman Republic, and were well marked in the curious jumble of Eastern and Western science which existed in the third and fourth centuries of our era.

The Greeks made a considerable study of Astronomy, and so were in a position to understand the claims made by the Chaldeans for their views of the influence of the stars upon human destinies. Having learned the elements of the strange astrologic doctrines, the later Greeks sought for references to them in their own earlier writers; and especially in the venerable works of Homer and Hesiod, possibly because they disliked to acknowledge that any sort of learning was not in the possession of their ancestors.

So far as can be judged the deities of the early Greeks were not closely related to the Sun and Planets, although the later Greeks identified their Apollo with Helios the Sun, and Artemis with the Moon. The earlier Greeks looked upon the Sun as driving his chariot through the sky, but the Sun was not an Olympian God, and held a minor rank in the earliest Pantheon. Venus, the planet, was called Hesperus, as the evening star, and there was

the morning star Eosphorus, but it was not until the time at any rate of Pythagoras, circa 612 B.C., that they were considered to be the same heavenly body. It has been asserted by Müller, the German savant, in his treatise on Mythology, that the astronomical Greek myths were few, and they were not closely related to their religion.

In the Iliad of Homer, neither the Sun nor Moon is spoken of as driving a chariot, but in the Odyssey Aurora, the Dawn is so described.

According to the much later Roman author Manilius, the chariot of the Sun had four horses, and the chariot of the Moon only two.

Aristotle is the earliest writer whose works are extant in Greek, who mentions the circle of the Zodiac. Euripides, however, speaks of Hippo, daughter of Chiron, as being able to divine future events by means of observations of the stars.

It is of course true that recent writers on Greek myths have asserted relations between the incidents of these myths and astronomical facts, and have explained that Greek and Roman religious ideals were connected with the worship of the Sun, Moon, and Stars.

The probably mythical Orpheus is said to have first taught Astronomy to the Greeks.

There are three lands which contest the claim to the earliest astronomical observations, Egypt, India, and the Akkadian empire of uncertain area, to which succeeded the Babylonian civilization with which the Chaldeans and Hebrews were later associated. China also postulates a claim to an unknown antiquity for its astronomic learning, and Astrology has always flourished among the Chinese. There are really no data yet discovered which can prove which land was the source of Astronomy; most probably the study was undertaken not only separately, but at much the same early period.

The Akkadian or pre Chaldean civilization is only of recent discovery, and has been obtained from studies of excavations in the regions of Babylonia.

From literary evidence derived from antiquity we have some proofs of very early astronomic observations made by all these ancient nations. The old Greek and Roman authors refer the source of Astronomy variously to Egypt, to Chaldea, and to Persia, and the papyri recently discovered in Egypt also show astronomical allusions; while of course the pyramids of Egypt and the towers of Babylonia have led students to postulate that their builders possessed a deep astronomic knowledge. Modern researches into Sanscrit literature have also led students of Eastern lore to the belief that the inhabitants of India in the earliest times must have made long and accurate observations of the heavenly bodies.

According to Isaac Meyer there is reason to think that the Akkadian observations of the stars date back to about 4310 B.C., when the Vernal Equinox occurred in the sign of Taurus.

The earliest allusion to actual divination by the stars in Greek literature is found in the "Timæus" of Plato. Eudoxus became acquainted with Chaldean Astrology.

Diodorus the historian, who flourished about 30 B.C., states that the Chaldeans foretold the death of Antigonus in 315 B.C.

Vitruvius states that Astrology was introduced into Greece by Berosus, who settled in Cos, and held a school there. Berosus was a Chaldean and was a contemporary of Alexander the Great.

From his time Astrology became naturalized among the Greeks. It was much cultivated by the Stoic philosophers.

From Greece the study passed naturally to Italy and to Rome. Cato the Elder refers to it.

Cneius Octavius had an astrologic figure found on his person when he was slain in the days of Marius.

Sylla was advised by the Chaldeans. Cicero speaks of divination received by Pompey and Crassus. Lucian also states that Julius Cæsar noted the revolutions of the stars.

Nigidius Figulus was famous as an astrologer in the later years of the Roman Republic, and foretold the supremacy of Augustus Cæsar.

These Roman astrologers became generally known as Chaldeans, whether they were Greeks or Italians; they rose to the zenith of fame in the early century of the Empire, but later were restrained by legal decisions, from the overt practice of their Art.

Theogenes, a citizen of Apollonia, was consulted by Augustus Cæsar.

Thrasyllus was the astrologer of Tiberius Cæsar; his son was consulted by Nero.

Ptolomæus advised Otho, and Seleneus gave warnings to Vespasian. These facts are narrated by the historian Tacitus. The astrologer Heliodorus was the adviser of the Emperor Valens.

Juvenal mentions the astrologers on several occasions.

The early Christian fathers all condemned judicial astrology, among these Tertullian, Augustine and Isidorus were most famous.

Apart from mythological fancies, the first man of whom it can be proved that he had astronomical knowledge is Thales, a citizen of Miletus, and the founder of the Ionic system of philosophy; he died about 546 B.C. He predicted an eclipse, the horrid darkness of which stopped a battle between the Medes under Cyaxares, and the Lydians led by Alyattes.

He was believed to have gained his knowledge of the heavenly bodies from Egyptian sources; Josephus and Plutarch both say he went to Egypt to study astronomy.

The Greeks seem to have recognised a meteorologic astrology, but not a divinatory form. The chief outflow of Chaldean lore over Greece was during the first three centuries before Christ. The Greek philosophers had good reasons for adopting its notions, first because their Oracles had ceased to speak and they needed an alternative mode of divine guidance. Secondly they approved of

the idea of a personal genius for each man, and so took kindly to the astrological ideal of a planetary guardianship and influence, and lastly as many Greeks taught that the souls of great men became stars, so many stars must have a relation to men still living on earth; this idea especially was related to the stars of the Via Lactea or Milky Way. The poet Manilius has left some verses on this subject.

The astrology of the early Romans was an intricate and difficult study; its professors were called the Mathematici. From their time throughout the years even to Kepler, who died 1630, it may be said that every astronomer was also an astrologer to some extent. From his time the tendency to renounce astrologic claims has continually increased, until at the present day it is rare to find an astronomer of position who acknowledges any faith in prediction or in diagnosis of character from the position of the planets at birth of any man, and still less will he believe in the processes called Horary Astrology, or the judgments of Fate derived from figures of the sky drawn for the time of the special event, or for the time of asking the question.

To return to the origins of history we find references to astrologic notions in the civilizations of Babylon and Chaldea, on the banks of the Ganges of India, on the Nile of Egypt and also in Turanian Chinese history. From Chaldea Astrology came to Persia and Asia Minor, to Greek culture, to Roman cities, and to the Jews who overspread all these parts after the destruction of Jerusalem.

It is said that the Arabs knew of the science even before the days of Mohammed; the Saracens carried it to Spain about 711 A.D. and the Moors from North Africa brought it afresh to Western Europe by their invasion of Spain in 1237. From the seventh to the thirteenth century the minds of these Arabian-descended conquerors in Europe were filled with astrologic notions; we have heard of the great renown of Messalah, Albumazar, Almanseer, El Batani and Ibn Yunis.

Our English Astrology comes from two sources, direct from the East, and from the Moors through Spain about 1200; but it is only from the time of the invention of printing that we have many records of the science. Some of the earliest volumes treating of Astrology are almost as complete in many points as our treatises written to-day, and most astrological authors of the last two hundred years, have merely copied one from another; even in our own times the most recent books tell us little more than do the works of Lilly, Gadbury, Salmon, Heydon, and Coley.

One recent new departure may be noted, by W. G. Old who has introduced a mode of rectifying nativities by the Pre-Natal Epoch; which he claims to be more accurate than the old methods of the Animodar of Ptolemy, and the Trutine of Hermes. The pseudonymous Raphael has also devised a system of reckoning primary and secondary Directions, differing from that of Zadkiel's Lilly.

Quoting we presume from Talmudic tradition, Josephus the

historian of the Jews asserts that Adam was instructed by divine inspiration in Astrology, and that his son Seth practised the art. He wrote about A.D. 66. The annals of the Ottoman Empire, and the history of the Mohammedan rulers in Asia, Africa and Spain, teem with narratives of astrological predictions, and supernatural warnings which helped to arouse the enthusiasm of these hardy and superstitious warriors. Osman the First, the founder of the Ottoman Empire in 1299, is said to have been much guided by a sheik who professed Astrology. Timour or Tamerlane, the Tartar Chief, was induced to make war with Bajazet, the Sultan of Turkey about the year 1400, by warning received by the Astrologer Abdullah Lissan, and defeated him, as had been foretold.

The sudden death of Murad the Second about 1451, who was a Sultan of Turkey, and in good health, was prophesied by the astrologic divination of a dervish; he died three days after.

The glories of the reign of Mohammed the Second was foretold by the astrologers; he ruled from 1452 to 1480; he it was who took Constantinople. An astrologer foretold with correctness the fates of Selim the First, 1520, and of his son Suleyman who was born in 900th year of the Hegira. In the reign of Selim the Second, 1572, there appeared a comet regarding which the astrologers prophesied great floods, which subsequently occurred, causing immense damage to three cities.

Mohammed the Third received a prophecy from a dervish that he would die in fifty six days, and it so happened in 1603.

Murad the Fourth was warned by a sheik astrologer in 1640 that he would have an unpropitious fate at an early date, and he did die according to the terms of the warning in 1640.

We possess a record of a celebrated astrologer Giamasp, surnamed Al Hakim the wise, a physician who flourished in the reign of King Darius Hystaspes of Persia, about 500 B.C. He is said to have foretold the coming of Jesus, the future founding of a great religion by Mahomet, and that the Magian faith should be abandoned; see the classic work of Dr. Hyde on the ancient Persians.

The Old Testament has several references to astrology, and to soothsayers who judged of human events, divining them by the stars. These refer to the Chaldean philosophers, who were called Magi. Consult these references:—Isiah xlvii. 13.—“Let now the astrologers stand up, and save thee from these things.” Daniel i. 20.—The King found Daniel better than all the astrologers in his realm. Daniel ii. 27.—Daniel asks the King if the astronomers cannot show the secret to the King. Daniel iv. 7.—The astrologers failed to explain a dream. Daniel v. 7, 11.—The King calls on the astrologers to explain a writing. Genesis xli. 8.—The magicians are called on to explain a dream of Pharaoh.

In the New Testament, consult:—Acts xix. 19.—Men who possessed curious books burned them before Paul.

As regards Divination in general, this magical art is represented by three Hebrew words—Maquesem, Kasiphim, and Lachash. In Numbers xxii. 7.—The elders of Moab and of Midian have rewards

for Divination. In Deuteronomy xviii. 9-10.—Diviners are condemned, and the Jews are to consider them as an abomination. In Ezekiel xii. 24.—The Lord denies the use of Divination to the people of Israel. In Ezekiel xiii. 7, 23.—Diviners are forbidden.

In the New Testament we find a note in Acts xvi. 16.—A damsel has powers of divination, she brought her masters much money; Paul cast out the spirit, and she lost her powers.

In the Bible there are many references to the stars, planets and Zodiac. Mazzaroth is a word found in Job xxxviii. 32, and is now believed to refer to the Signs of the Zodiac. Genesis i. 14.—“Let the lights of the firmament be for signs.” Deuteronomy xxxiii. 14.—“Blessed be the Lord for the precious things put forth by the moon.” The Pleiades, called Kimah, and the constellation Orion, as Kesib, are found mentioned in Job ix. 9 Orion appears to have been also a name applied to Nimrod the mighty hunter ruler.

Amos v. 8 speaks of the seven stars, and Orion.

The name Arcturus, called Ash and Aish is believed by some to be the stars of Ursa major, and not the star now so called. In Job xxxviii. 32, Arcturus and his sons are referred to.

Jupiter, as Zeus, either as pagan god, or as a planet, is referred to in Acts xiv. 12; and in 2 Maccabæus vi. 2, we read that Antiochus sent to the Jews a message that the Holy Temple was to be dedicated to Jupiter Olympus.

In Judges v. 20 we read.—“The stars in their courses fought against Sisera”; which seems to imply an astrologic ideal of stellar influence over the fates of men.

Lucifer, the morning star or planet which paled before the rising sun, and in Hebrew called Hilal, was the Greek Eosphoros. This name was not applied to Satan until Jerome so used it; Milton adopted it. The Moon was called Irak and Levanah, or Labanah, and was considered the ruler of night.

The Sun was named Shemesh, and Chamah, and Cheres; and was called the ruler of day.

The Hebrew word for star in general was Kukab, but this word was also applied to the planet Venus, especially by the Kabalistic rabbis of the middle ages.

I may mention a few notable astrologers individually:—

Claudius Ptolemy lived at Alexandria in Egypt, the great centre of learning in the first century, A.D. His works illustrated one of the earlier systems of Astronomy, which have come down to us, and many astrological treatises are extant which bear his name. He was the eminent student who rescued the labours of Hipparchus, who lived 200 years before him, from oblivion. His most famous volume is the “Almagest,” and from this work later authors have largely extracted the treatises called “Tetrabiblos” and “Quadripartite,” or the Four Books of Astrology. There is a Latin edition, printed at Basle in 1551, still to be found in a few libraries.

The Venerable Bede is said to have studied astrology; he died in 735.

Albumazar, a famous Arab astrologer flourished in A.D. 800.

Roger Bacon who lived from 1214 to 1292 was much addicted to astrology.

> No Master
R.

About 1300 a Franciscan monk, named Guido Bonatus, was a famous Italian astrologer; he divined that his patron, the Earl of Monserrat, should fight a certain battle with success, but should be wounded in the knee, and so it fell out in both events. He wrote "De Astronomia," tractatus x.; these were printed at Basle in 1550.

Henry Cornelius Agrippa was one of the most famous of the old occult philosophers and his works are full of astrological ideas. He was born, 1486, at Cologne, he was astrologer to Francis the First of France about 1524 and lost that office because he foretold unfavourable events. His three volumes on Occult Philosophy were published about 1530. He is said to have formed in Paris and in London secret societies of astrologic and alchymic students, which some think formed one of the sources of the rise in Freemasonry. He died in 1535. A later fourth volume appears to be spurious.

Florent de Villiers was famous as an astrologer at the court of Louis the Eleventh of France about 1465; he carried on a school of astrology and King Charles the Seventh, the father of Louis the Eleventh, is said to have attended these classes.

Lord Burleigh calculated the nativity of our Queen Elizabeth, and she with other princes consulted Dr. John Dee, the astrologer, who was certainly to some extent a charlatan; he lived from 1527 to 1608.

Michael Scott, who lived in the thirteenth century, was famous for his astrological knowledge and was much esteemed by the Emperor Frederick the Second, whose death at Florence happened as he had foretold; he also divined the manner of his own death by the fall of a stone, and this occurred in a church by the falling of a stone from the roof.

Julius Firmicus Maternus wrote an astrologic treatise in Venice, 1497. Valentine Naibod, of Padua, foretold danger to himself from a sword wound, and many years after was murdered by thieves in his house—they stabbed him. He wrote "De cœlo et terra," libri 3, Venice, 1573.

Nostradamus (Michel de Notre Dame) was one of the most famous astrologers of France; he was the physician of King Henry the Second, and became especially notable about 1555. His astrologic prophesies were written in a thousand stanzas of four lines each. Catherine de Médicis made him her special favourite. He died in 1566 as physician to King Charles the Ninth; the best edition of his "Prophecies" is that of Amsterdam, 1668.

Antiochus Tibertus flourished in the Romagna of Italy in the fifteenth century, and was astrologer to Prince Malatesta of Rimini.

Elias Ashmole of Oxford, the famous antiquarian, speaks of the Annual Astrologers' Feast, and mentions the Rev. M. Butler,

Saunders, Town Clerk of London, Thomas Vaughan, Sir Edmund Dering, and Wm. Backhouse as noted astrologers.

The astrologic works of William Lilly are still consulted; he was born in 1602. He was a great admirer of the "Ars Notoria" of Agrippa. He published an astrological almanac from 1644 until his death in 1681. In 1651 he issued two hieroglyphical pictures, one of a scene of epidemic deaths, and the other of a great fire seen from London Bridge. These events happened fifteen years after, in 1665 and 1666, and he even fell under suspicion of having been privy to the cause of the Great Fire of London. King Charles the First also consulted Lilly when imprisoned in Carisbrooke Castle in 1647, and was advised to travel eastward for safety, but instead he journeyed to the West, with unfortunate results. At the end of William Lilly's "Christian Astrology," edition 1647, there is a valuable catalogue of astrological books.

John Gadbury was a pupil of William Lilly. He became a famous astrologer and published a series of almanacs; he died in 1691. He published his "Genethliologia, or Doctrine of Nativities," in 1658; "Celestial Ambassador," 1656; "Nativity of King Charles the First," in 1659, and the "Nature of Prodigies" in 1660.

Francis Barrett was the author of "The Magus," published in London in 1801; it is a compendium of the occult lore of his time. The printing of the Hebrew words teems with errors.

In 1828 there appeared "The Manual of Astrology," by Raphael, which contains coloured prophetic pictures; it is a sound and comprehensive astrological treatise.

"The Familiar Astrologer," 1849, and "The Astrologer of the Nineteenth Century," 1825, were also published by this anonymous astrologer.

It has been asserted that Sir Isaac Newton began his study of astronomy on account of the interest which astrological books had aroused in his mind. He was born in Lincolnshire on December 25 (old style), 1642; he showed from the laws formulated by Kepler the nature of the forces which conduct the planets in their courses.

The astronomical labours of Tycho Brahe, who died 1601, were tinged by astrological ideas, and his successor Kepler, who died in 1630, was also a student of the works of the old astrologers.

Geronimo Cardan, born at Paris in 1501, has left a large number of volumes which testify to his researches into the laws of astrology; he was both an M.A. and an M.D.

A short list of noted English astrological books is here added. It includes the volumes most frequently referred to:—

Lilly, William. "Christian Astrology," 1647.

"Christian Astrology Modestly Treated," 1659.

Eland, C. "A Tutor to Astrologie," 1670.

Gadbury, J. "Thesaurus Astrologiæ," 1674.

Coley, Henry. "Clavis Astrologiæ elimata," 1676.

Partridge, John. "Opus Reformatum," 1694; "Defectio Geniturarum," 1697.

Ball, R. "Astrology Improved," 1723.

Derham, Wm. "Astro-Theology," 1755.

Heydon, C. "The New Astrologie," 1786.

"The Conjuror's Magazine," 1792.

Wilson, John. "A complete Dictionary of Astrology," 1819.

Ashmand, J. M. "The Tetrabiblos of Claudius Ptolemy," 1822.

"The Spirit of Partridge," 1825.

Raphael. "The Astrologer of the Nineteenth Century," 1825.

Varley, John. "Zodiacal Physiognomy," 1828.

Zadkiel. "The Horoscope," 1834, 1841.

Zadkiel. "The Introduction to Astrology," 1835.

Ebn Shemaya. "The Star," 1839.

Simmonite, W. J. "The Prognostic Astronomer," 1851.

Hermes. "The Astrologer's Vade Mecum," 1851.

Zadkiel. "The Grammar of Astrology," 1852.

"A Plea for Urania," 1854 (by C. Cook).

Wilson, John. "The lost Solar System of the Ancients," 1856.

Wilson, John. "The Tetrabiblos of Ptolemy."

Zadkiel. "Handbook of Astrology," 1861-62.

Christian, Philip. "Histoire de la Magie," Paris (1870?).

Kingsford, Anna. "Astrology Theologized," 1886.

Raphael. "Horary Astrology," 1887.

Simmonite, W. J. "The Arcana of Astrology," 1890.

Simmonite, W. J. "The Daily Guide," by Jno. Storey, 1891.

Pearce, A. J. "Zadkiel's Science of the Stars," 1892.

Old, W. Gorn. "Lectures on Astrology," 1893.

Charubel. "The Degrees of the Zodiac Symbolized," 1898.

Green, H. S. "The Theoretical Value of the Degrees of the Zodiac," 1898.

Old, W. Gorn. "New Manual of Astrology," 1898.

Raphael, R. Cross. "The Guide to Astrology," 2 vols., 1877, 4 editions.

Hindoo Astrology:—"The Siddhanta Siromani," Calcutta, 1860.

"The Brihat Sanhita of Vahari Mihira," 1884. "The Brihat Jataka," 1885. Brennand, W. "Hindoo Astronomy," 1896.

A very sympathetic reference to Astrology as the forerunner of astronomy will be found in "Old and New Astronomy" by Richard A. Proctor, London, 1892. He says—"None of the races of antiquity rose above a certain level of civilization without developing a belief in the influences of the heavenly bodies, and without devising systems for reading and ruling the planets."

According to Lalande it was not until the time of Saint Clement of Alexandria in the second century, that natural became distinguished from judicial astrology, and astronomy from astrology.

Astrology then has been a science from the earliest times, and eminent men of all ages have either made it a study, or have sought the advice of astrologers. Its attractiveness has led many men to a serious study of astronomy, a more tangible science,

which has developed into enormous importance. That Astronomy has supplanted Astrology is certain, and yet astrological ideals are still very much of interest to a great number of people. The hope of a possible science of knowing the unknown is doubtless at the root of the matter. Man is always seeking to know what is hidden, and the renewed interest in all forms of occult science is one of the phenomena of our own times.

Men and women are no longer persecuted for occult learning, but they are still subject to mild rebuke, and some public slights if they openly avow a hope of the possibility of any form of divination, a proceeding condemned by the Christian faith.

This objection is made light of by many students, because history shews that all forms of even recognised science were at one time condemned by the Church; they have not forgotten the persecutions of Galileo. It is still an open question whether there is any stellar or planetary influence upon man, beyond the recognised action of the sun and moon. All other heavenly bodies are certainly very far off and have hardly any appreciable scientific action upon our earth and must have still less on individual man. Still gradation of influence is more in keeping with nature's laws than is abrupt termination or absence of influence. Occasional successful astrological results point to the existence of a basis of truth in the science, but frequent errors made by its most noted professors certainly shew that the rules of Astrology are still far from being accurate. Until modern science can shew the astrologer, by some ultra-astrological explanation, why some of his results have been correct, the astrologers may claim to believe that the methods and principles of divination have some basis in the workings of nature.

